



MARANACOOK AREA SCHOOLS RSU 38

A Caring School Community Dedicated to Excellence

April 16, 2026

Dear Maranacook Community,

I am writing with an update from last evening's Board meeting and with some words I hope you'll find both informative and encouraging.

The Board Approved the FY2027 Budget – Last night, the Board of Directors approved the third draft of the FY2027 budget. I want to take a moment to explain what changed between the second and third drafts, because the news is genuinely positive.

The approved budget comes in at **\$24,156,584** — a **\$206,689 reduction** from the second draft, and a **2.02% increase** over FY2026 compared to the 2.89% increase in the prior draft. Three factors drove this improvement:

- **Health insurance:** Anthem's final rates reflect a **7.28% increase** — significantly lower than the 15% projected in the second draft, resulting in meaningful savings for the district.
- **Dental insurance:** The final dental insurance rate came in at a **3.67% increase**, well below the 7% projected.
- **CATC allocation:** An increased state allocation directly to CATC eliminates the cost-sharing assessment previously passed to member districts, reducing our obligation by \$2,481.
- **Additional Balance forward:** We received an updated amount between the second and third draft from DOE, resulting in an additional \$3,209 (now \$87,398 total), reflecting a FY25 state audit adjustment for superintendent agreements, which further reduces the local tax burden.

The impact on local taxpayers is meaningful. The district-wide local contribution increase drops from 6.75% in the second draft to **5.42%** in the third. Every town sees a reduction: Manchester from 5.62% to 4.29%, Readfield from 5.37% to 3.96%, Wayne from 6.00% to 4.76%, and Mt. Vernon from 10.63% to 9.32%.

We recognize that any increase in the local tax burden is felt differently depending on a family's circumstances. For households already stretched thin, and for our older neighbors on fixed incomes, even a smaller percentage increase represents a real and meaningful cost. We do not take that lightly. What we can say is that we worked hard to bring this number down as far as responsibly possible while continuing to meet the needs of our students and staff, and we will keep that same commitment as we move through the year ahead.

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How Budget Validation Works in Maine – For those who may not be familiar with the process, here is what happens next. In Maine, school district budgets go through a public validation process before taking effect. The approved budget will be presented at our Annual Meeting on Wednesday, May 13, where community members will have the opportunity to hear it, discuss it, and vote on it. Following the Annual Meeting, the budget goes to a validation referendum at the polls on Tuesday, June 9, where registered voters in all four towns — Manchester, Mount Vernon, Readfield, and Wayne — cast ballots to confirm it. Both steps are required under Maine law (Title 20-A) before the budget can be implemented.

As Maranacook residents, please consider participating in both the Annual Meeting on Wednesday, May 13, and the vote at the polls on Tuesday, June 9. Your engagement as a community member matters, and we encourage you to share those dates with your neighbors as well.

Looking Ahead: Strategic Planning and the Future of Maranacook — This coming year, we will begin a community-wide strategic planning process — our 'Building Stronger Together' initiative. The goal is straightforward: to make thoughtful, informed decisions together about the future of this district, rather than in isolation.

The challenges we face — enrollment trends, aging facilities, shifting state funding, and the broader pressures reshaping public education nationwide — are real and require honest conversation. Society is changing. The economy is changing. The needs of students and families are changing. Addressing those changes well means drawing on the knowledge and experience of the people closest to this work every day.

Maranacook is a community with deep roots and a genuine commitment to its children. Keeping this district strong for the next generation requires that we face hard questions honestly and work through them together. The strategic planning process is how we do that, and every voice in this district has a role to play.

The plan-to-plan committee membership is nearing finalization and will meet to select a qualified strategic planning consultant to lead the district's 2026–2027 planning process. Specifically, the group will:

- Review and evaluate proposals, pricing, approaches, and vendor backgrounds to make an informed selection,
- Ensure the planning process reflects the values, voices, and unique context of the Maranacook community, and
- Establish the structure, timeline, and community engagement framework for the full strategic planning effort.

By the end of June, you will receive, along with the rest of the community, an invitation to join the full strategic planning committee, as well as information on community forums and other ways to participate in this process.

Thank you for your continued dedication to the Maranacook students, families, and community.

With gratitude and optimism,



Karen G. Smith

RSU 38 Superintendent of Schools

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